

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 385

TM 012 197

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TITLE The Effects of Study Skills, Self-Management, and
Motivation Training on Academic Performance.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *College Freshmen; Curriculum
Evaluation; *Educational Assessment; Higher
Education; *Student Motivation; *Study Skills;
*Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Self Management

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of a triadic model of study skills, self-management, and motivation training on academic performance. Study subjects were freshman enrolled in study skills/life skills courses at a small Southwestern university. Two groups of students were given training in study skills and self-management utilizing the same course text. Both groups used the text "Becoming a Master Student" by D. B. Ellis (1985). Students met during two class periods per week for a full semester. One of the two groups, in addition to the regular study skills and self-management training, was administered an experimental motivational treatment that was integrated into course content and was based on a participatory affirmation process. The treatment group included 21 female and 21 male students. The control group included 20 female and 21 male students. A pretest-posttest design was used to evaluate outcomes. Results indicate that motivation is a salient variable in study skills research. A 32-item list of references is provided. (Author/TJH)

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ED300385

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TM 012 197

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of a triadic model of study skills, self-management, and motivation training on academic performance. Two groups of university students were given training in study skills and self-management utilizing the same course text. One of the two groups, in addition to the regular study skills and self-management training, was administered an experimental motivational treatment which was integrated into the course content. Results of the significance of the study is presented with suggestions for further research.

The Effects of Study Skills, Self-Management,
and Motivation Training on Academic Performance

A variety of study skills and remedial courses are offered by most colleges and universities for the purpose of improving students' academic performance (Kirschenbaum, & Perri, 1982). The proliferation of these programs is the necessary response to countering reduced academic performance substantiated by declining SAT scores, and lower tested achievement of college graduates (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Numerous studies have been conducted in an effort to identify those study skill behaviors that, in fact, do improve academic performance. Most studies focus on a constellation of behavior that is generally recognized as important to academic success. These study skills will normally comprise the content of texts used in such courses, and usually include note taking, reading, test taking, and paper writing (McWhorter, 1986; Ellis, 1985).

An important early study analyzed various treatment programs and concluded that effective intervention consisted of structured formats, lengthy rather than brief, and included counseling in addition to study skills training (Bedner & Weinberg, 1970). Recognizing that simply knowing study skill techniques does not ensure their usage, researchers have focused on various elements of the "counseling" dimension as defined by a variety of self-control factors (Robyak, 1977). Self-control techniques will usually include planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-reward, and problem solving (Kirschenbaum & Perri, 1982).

It has been found that self-monitoring can have a positive impact on

academic performance (Richards, McReynolds, Holt, & Selton, 1976). Concrete tracking of daily study time by means of schedules and graphs provide a continual feedback that alters behavior (Mount, & Tirrell, 1977). In contrast, Fremouw and Feindler (1978) found that study skills and self-control treatments did not improve GPA, even though there was a significant gain in basic study skills techniques. Similarly, it was found that while subjects trained in planned scheduling and isolation outperformed those utilizing problem solving and broad stimulus control, neither group had significantly higher grades than did controls (Hefferman, & Richards, 1981).

A multi-component self-control treatment consisting of study skills, self-monitoring, progressive relaxation, stimulus control, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement was successful in raising GPA (Grovesman, Richards, & Caple, 1977). However, a multi-component treatment consisting of study skills, self-monitoring, self rewards and planning, produced no significant GPA increase (Greiner, & Karoly, 1976). Knowing that test anxiety can also affect academic performance, researchers have paired study skills training with test anxiety reduction treatment. A study by Melnick and Russell (1976) found that while systematic desensitization reduced test anxiety over hypnosis and study skills treatment, the only positive trend toward grade improvement was in the control group! However, combining study skills training with desensitization did produce higher GPA's over either study skills or control group alone (Lent, & Russell, 1978). In general, long term effects of study skills and test anxiety treatment are inconclusive (Allen, & Desaulniers, 1974).

Treatment combining study skills training with behavior contracting

has proven effective in raising GPA (Himelstein, & Himelstein, 1977). After 2 years, one contract group was consistently outperforming non-contract and control groups in GPA (Goldman, 1978). Strategies for maintaining self-control treatment gains utilizing "faded counselor contact," has produced contradictory findings (Richards, et. al, 1976), however, a problem-solving procedure was found to be operative one year later (Richards, & Perri, 1978). The continued search for identifying variables related to academic success, finds study skills being paired with such diverse factors as teacher-mentor-counselor treatments (Obler, Francis, & Wishengrad, 1977) and personality types (Robyak, & Downey, 1978). Perhaps as a result of the inconclusive data, Robyak (1977) suggests that study skills programs may have to consider personality types in developing curricula.

A review of relevant studies addressing the issue of maximizing academic performance will reveal the problems and inconsistencies as cited. That a degree of uncertainty exists is evident when a leading researcher in the field believes that the main problem is in identifying the techniques that really work, and how to get them to last (Richards, 1981). There is general agreement that research has established the situational efficacy of study skills with self-control training (primarily self-monitoring). With that conclusion, Richards (1981) proposes that the third integrating element lies in maintenance of the entire constellation. That is, study skills, self-control, and maintenance. While there is current research in the area of maintenance, it yet remains the relatively new dimension of the triad.

A more recent review and analysis of study skills research by Kirschenbaum and Perri (1982) arrives at a similar conclusion.

Acknowledging the necessity of study skills training coupled with self-regulatory skills (self-control), the authors propose a third component of motivators, or setting events. Maintenance of the study skills and self-control training is the motivation to continue effective application. The proposed model, then, is one consisting of the three components: a) Motivation, b) Study Skills, and c) Self-regulatory Skills. The current study was designed to implement and test a three-component model as proposed by Kirschenbaum and Perri (1982), the null hypothesis being that there will be no significant difference in measurement scores or semester GPA's between the treatment and control groups.

Method

Subjects

The subjects participating in the study were enrolled in study skills/life skills (SS/LS) courses at a small Southwestern university. The classes consisted of freshmen students required to enroll in the 2 hour credit course based on the results of their ACT composite scores (scoring 14 or below). The largest percentage of participants were recent high school graduates, but also included some older returning students. The treatment group was comprised of two classes totaling 21 female and 21 male students. The control group was also comprised of two classes totaling 20 female and 21 male students. Since numerous sections of the SS/LS courses were offered, students participating in the study happened to be enrolled in the selected classes simply because of their semester schedule.

Procedure

Both treatment and control groups used the text Becoming a Master

Student by Dave Ellis (1985), addressing the topics of: a) personal responsibility, b) time management, c) note-taking, d) reading, e) test taking, f) creativity, g) relationships, h) health, i) money, j) resources, and k) careers. The text is structured in such a way that students are taught both basic study skills and self-regulatory techniques. This is accomplished in part by an integrated journal entry system that requires the students to make continual self appraisal by means of written "discovery" and "intention" statements. The two components of the triad model, study skills and self-regulation, are integral elements of the course text.

Students met two class periods a week for a full semester. The class format consisted of varied types of teaching and class participation, all structured around the text content. The two groups were taught by different teachers.

The independent variable of the triad model, motivation, was administered to the treatment group in a series of interventions throughout the semester. By incorporating this variable into the regular curriculum, the students were unaware of their participation in the study. The treatment was based on an experimental motivation component that attempted to internalize the students' desire to succeed. This "Participatory Affirmation Process" (PAP) component consisted of an initial lecture that focused on the evaluation of decisions that students make, in most endeavors, to either participate or spectate. Examples of applied implications and specific "real-life" outcome events were presented.

At mid-term, the treatment group was presented with an additional lecture that emphasized the natural process of growth as it relates to

the participative aspect of the PAP. Additionally, throughout the semester, reinforcement of the PAP was effected by the teacher writing the word YES! on the blackboard at the beginning of each class session. According to the PAP, the word YES might possibly be an academically enhancing dynamic similar to the subliminal effects of the "oneness fantasy" exercise (Parker, 1982), but only as it interprets the PAP.

Measures

A pre-test post-test measurement of the course content was given at the beginning and end of the semester, utilizing a multiple choice format. Internal validity was based on test construction from a table of specifications that sampled the text content. Split-half reliability performed on an earlier form of the instrument (Shaughnessy & Dodd, 1987) yielded a correlation of .97. It is believed that the current revised and expanded form will produce a reliability coefficient in the high 90's.

Results

Analysis of the test data utilized a paired-comparisons t-test at a level of significance of .05, the pre-test post-test measurement being the variable. The assumption of equal variances was checked with a folded F-test and found reasonable. The null hypothesis (H_0 : no difference between the two groups) was rejected at a significance level of .0001. The probability value for the null hypothesis that the mean of the pre-test post-test measurements equals zero is $p=.0001$.

Discussion

The results of this study seem to indicate that motivation is a salient variable in study skills research. The relatively untested factor of motivation may be the variable that has resulted in conflicting

results in research on study skills as cited previously. This is not to infer that motivation is lacking altogether. The model proposed by Kirschenbaum and Perri (1982) suggests that the motivational component consist of, a) perceived control, b) compensated participation, c)technologically oriented intervention structure, and d) positive efficacy expectations. Two of the four proposed factors are integrated within the course. Consequently, the motivating factors of compensation (2 hours credit), and structure are present in both treatment and control groups. The treatment is attempting to address the factors of perceived control and positive efficacy expectations, while not entirely lacking in both groups, are not an integral part of the course content.

While the PAP intervention may address other dynamics of motivation, the nature of the process should at least impact the two factors under consideration. Both of these factors, control and expectation, are acknowledged motivators, or setting events, that can improve academic performance (Atkinson, 1964; Bandura, 1977; Brigham, 1979; Buck, 1976; Henson, 1977; Lefcourt, 1979; Valle, 1975;). Additionally, the treatment procedure may corroborate the self-reinforcement, internal development as presented by Glasser (in Ford, 1982), and possibly relate to the previously cited "oneness fantasy" (Parker, 1982).

Because of possible confounding variables of experimenter interaction (experimenter as teacher of treatment group), the GPA may be the more indicative measure of significance. It will be difficult to eliminate instructional bias when measuring gain in course content, consequently, if the motivational treatment is effective, it should be manifest apart from the specific course in which the treatment is applied. In future research, it will be necessary to control for, and identify, those

motivational factors that are instrumental in study skills application. It appears that the triadic model provides, at least, a new avenue for further investigation into study skills training and academic performance.

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